



Annual Report of Director of Traffic

OF THE
District of Columbia :: 1925



At the same time, the government has been working to improve the quality of the education system.

ANNUAL REPORT OF
THE DIRECTOR OF TRAFFIC
OF THE
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA



1925



WASHINGTON
GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

1925



ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF TRAFFIC, 1925

SEPTEMBER 14, 1925.

The office of the director of traffic, which was established by act of Congress March 3, 1925, began operation on March 25, 1925. The personnel consists of the director; an assistant director, who is a traffic engineer; an executive assistant; and two stenographers, all appointed by the commissioners. Four additional clerks employed in the traffic bureau and a number of per diem laborers, engaged in painting signs, have since been added to the roll.

During the brief period preceding June 30 this new branch of the District government completed four outstanding accomplishments, which it is hoped will reduce accidents and facilitate traffic, namely:

First, the preparation of a modern code of traffic and registration regulations; second, the inauguration of a new and more rigid system for the issuance of motor-vehicle operators' permits; third, the purchase of traffic-signal lights to be installed at a number of important intersections on Sixteenth Street and on Massachusetts Avenue NW.; and, fourth, the elimination of parking on the flow side on congested sections of certain arterial highways during the morning and afternoon rush hours.

In revising the traffic and registration regulations the director and his assistants received the helpful cooperation of representatives of a number of civic and business organizations of Washington, as well as the legal and enforcement officials of the District government.

Many essential features of the old regulations, such as are in successful operation in other large cities, were included in the code. Several recommendations of the Hoover conference on street and highway safety and the United States Bureaus of Standards and Public Roads were also adopted, with a view of standardizing the regulations so that they might serve as a model to other jurisdictions.

Through the cooperation of the police department and the traffic court these regulations are being enforced without fear or favor.

In an effort to eliminate incompetent and reckless automobile drivers a plan for the issuance of operators' permits has been devised and put into operation. This plan provides that each applicant must undergo a rigid mental test on the regulations and give a practical demonstration of his ability to drive safely. If these tests are satisfactorily passed, the applicant is then granted a 10-day temporary permit, during which time the police department investigates the person's character and checks the information given in the application. If the application is approved by the captain of the precinct in which the person resides the annual permit is then issued.

Serious violations of the traffic regulations are being systematically followed by revocation of the operators' permits for a period of not

less than six months. Such action follows certification by the court, as provided for in the traffic act. Drastic penalties are being imposed by the court in all cases of driving without an operator's permit.

Following the advertisement for bids, the first set of synchronized electric traffic lights was purchased for installation on Sixteenth Street and on Massachusetts Avenue NW. It is believed that these signals will serve to promote safety and expedite traffic. They automatically stop the flow of all traffic in one direction while it is moving in the other. Thus there is permitted the smooth, swift, and uninterrupted flow of traffic for a fixed period through the entire length of the street on which the signals are installed. A change of signals for a similar period permits all traffic to flow through all intersections in the opposite direction.

This method of traffic control consists of automatic signals of red, yellow, and green. Red indicates stop; yellow, change; and green, proceed. Brackets will be used for mounting the lights on street lamp-posts at intersections and all will be of uniform height from the pavement, with one set of lights on each corner at each intersection. Control switches will be located in No. 1 fire station on K Street, with an auxiliary manual control at the intersection of U and Sixteenth Streets. This system is in successful operation in such cities as New York, Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Rochester, Syracuse, Atlantic City, and many others.

With the limited appropriation available for the ensuing year, it will be possible to extend this system from Lafayette Square to Florida Avenue on Sixteenth Street and from Twelfth to Eighteenth Streets on Massachusetts Avenue. Additional funds will be required if the system is to be extended.

It would be unreasonable to expect an appreciable decrease in traffic accidents within the short period from May to June, inclusive, but the results even during this period are encouraging, especially since there has been an increase of 27 per cent in motor-car registrations during the past year. Comparisons of traffic accidents for the period from May 3, 1925, when the new regulations became effective, to June 30, 1925, with the same period of the previous year are as follows:

May 3 to June 30, 1925

Fatal accidents.....	11
Serious injuries.....	9
Minor injuries.....	1,610

May 3 to June 30, 1924

Fatal accidents.....	16
Serious injuries.....	4
Minor injuries.....	1,604

Increase in automobile registration

Total registered, Jan. 1, 1924, to June 30, 1924.....	75,482
Total registered, Jan. 1, 1925, to June 30, 1925.....	95,806
Percentage of increase.....	27

It should be noted that in spite of the fact that there has been an increase of 27 per cent in the number of motor vehicles in use there has been no appreciable increase in the total number of accidents and a definite decrease in fatalities during this period.

Since May 3 a close check has been maintained on all traffic accidents and careful studies are being made to ascertain their cause and location. Accident spot maps and diagram charts are posted from day to day. Police reports are made out on each accident and these are tabulated and punched on Hollerith cards for analysis and study. Such records serve as a valuable guide for the proper regulation of traffic.

The establishment of the traffic court, which is constantly in session from 9 a. m. to 11 p. m. every week day, has made it possible to abolish the collateral system heretofore in use. The psychological effect on traffic violators has been most gratifying. The fact that all traffic offenders must now face the traffic judge instead of depositing a sum of money which could be forfeited has had the effect of materially reducing the number of traffic violations and arrests. There were 521 less arrests for traffic violations in August, 1925, than in August, 1924, in spite of the fact that there were 292 more police officers on the street.

The close and hearty cooperation of the police department and the traffic court with the director of traffic has led to the cancellation of a large number of permits and to jail sentences for serious offenders of the traffic act. This has had a most salutary effect upon chronic speeders, reckless drivers, and those who in the past were in the habit of driving their cars while under the influence of intoxicating liquor.

The system of arterial or boulevard stop highways authorized in the traffic act has been tentatively designated. It comprises the main trunk highways leading from the congested district to the Maryland and Virginia boundaries on the north, east, south, and west, as follows:

Sixteenth Street and Alaska Avenue from Lafayette Square to the District line.

Georgia, New Hampshire, Sherman, and Vermont Avenues from the District line to Iowa Circle and Florida Avenue and Sixth Street from Vermont Avenue to G Street.

Rhode Island and South Dakota Avenues from Scott Circle to Bladensburg Road.

Bladensburg Road from Fifteenth Street to the District line.

Pennsylvania Avenue SE. and Alabama Avenue from Second Street to the District line.

Good Hope and Naylor Roads from Nichols Avenue to the District line.

Connecticut Avenue from Chevy Chase Circle to Florida Avenue and Calvert and Eighteenth Streets from Connecticut Avenue to Massachusetts Avenue.

Massachusetts Avenue from Stanton Square NE., through Wisconsin Avenue NW., to the District line.

M Street from Twenty-eighth Street NW. to the Francis Scott Key Bridge.

Stop signs are being painted on the pavement at all intersecting highways as fast as our limited force and funds will permit. These signs will be supplemented as soon as possible by markers erected on posts adjacent to all intersections on boulevard stop streets. Until all these signs are clearly and unmistakably marked and motorists learn to obey them it would be most unwise to permit a

greater maximum speed on these highways than that which is fixed in the traffic act.

Elimination of all parking on the flow sides of certain congested sections of the more important arterial highways, such as Sixteenth Street and Connecticut Avenue, has had the effect of widening those streets from one to two traffic lanes, thus facilitating the traffic flow during rush hours and reducing the possibility of accidents.

Efforts have been made to improve parking conditions in the congested area, but inasmuch as there are nearly 100,000 cars in Washington and only space enough in the congested district for about 7,200, the problem is exceedingly difficult to solve.

Downtown garages, for the day storage of cars, are urgently needed, and would probably relieve the parking and traffic situation to some extent, but it is doubtful whether the all-day parkers would patronize such garages as long as they are able to obtain free and unlimited parking spaces within easy walking distance of their places of business.

Since assuming the duties of director of traffic I have endeavored to not only fulfill the requirements specified in the traffic act, but have also observed the need for certain changes in the present law and the need for additional legislation which would undoubtedly promote safety and facilitate traffic. I therefore present certain recommendations, which it is hoped will receive the earnest consideration of the commissioners when they present their report to Congress.

RENEWAL OF OPERATORS' PERMITS

If the director of traffic is clothed with ample authority to suspend and revoke permits, as requested later on in this report, it is believed that there will be no real need for the annual renewal of all drivers' permits. The time and expense involved in such a tremendous undertaking could, in my opinion, be spent to better advantage in an effort to eliminate from the streets that relatively small percentage of drivers who are mentally, physically, or morally unfit to drive automobiles.

It is therefore urgently recommended that this section of the traffic act, providing for annual renewal of drivers' permits, be stricken out.

If Congress insists that the permits are to be renewed annually, I would suggest that certain changes be made in the act pertaining to annual renewals, as follows:

The traffic act provides that all motor vehicle operators' permits shall expire on March 31 each year and must be renewed at that time. If this plan is undertaken, it will result in an annual rush of 150,000 or more applicants for permits during a short interval of time.

By amending the traffic act so as to cause such permits to be issued at intervals throughout the year and renew such permits as they expire one year from the date of issue, it would be possible to serve motorists with a smaller force of employees, less congestion, and more efficiency. This method is satisfactorily employed in Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

Under the plan proposed, the dates of expiration of permits could be staggered by calling in about 500 permits each day. By following

this method, it would be possible to organize a permanent clerical force which would operate throughout the year and which would be able to more carefully examine the applications than would be the case if they were issued at one time. It will be impossible to undertake this task, however, until adequate funds are provided for the necessary clerical assistance.

CARD RECORD OF DRIVERS

The need for a modern and up-to-date card index of all drivers in order that the past records of all drivers may be immediately available to police officers is apparent. The funds required for clerical assistance in the preparation and installation of such a record and for the purchase of the necessary supplies and equipment should be provided for in the estimates.

DRIVING WHILE UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF LIQUOR OR DRUGS

The traffic act makes it an offense to operate a motor vehicle while the driver thereof is under the influence of intoxicating liquor or narcotic drugs. "Motor vehicles" are defined by the act as "vehicles propelled or drawn by internal-combustion engine, electricity, or steam, except traction engines, road rollers, and vehicles propelled only upon rails and tracks."

Many means of transportation are equally as dangerous as motor vehicles when the persons in charge thereof are under the influence of intoxicants or drugs. I am of the opinion, therefore, that the traffic act should be so amended as to include the drivers of all vehicles operating over the public streets and highways, including the drivers of horse-drawn vehicles, motormen on street cars, operators of road rollers, and traction engines.

REVOCATION AND SUSPENSION OF DRIVERS' LICENSES

That portion of the traffic act dealing with revocation and suspension of operators' permits should be improved. The law gives the director of traffic authority, "after proper hearing," to suspend or revoke permits of those who violate any section of the regulations, but provides no such authority in regard to violations of sections of the act itself.

In nearly all of the States which have operators' permits the authorities are given more or less discretion in revoking and suspending permits, but under the traffic act permits can not be suspended or revoked for violating sections of the act until the cases have been tried and convictions obtained.

A number of cases have come to our attention where permits should have been suspended until the cases are brought up for trial. For instance, a driver who, while driving in a reckless or careless manner, kills or seriously injures a person, is under the act permitted to continue to operate his car pending trial. Many motorists have been brought into court for driving while intoxicated. These persons have been permitted to give bond and have been permitted to drive their cars pending trial. In one or two cases the same persons were again brought in for the same offense before the original trials could be held. Mental and physical defectives are, under the act, permitted to drive until they are convicted of some violation of

the traffic act. It is obvious that additional discretionary powers should be given the director of traffic to cancel and suspend permits.

ROTATION OF TRAFFIC VIOLATIONS ON PERMITS

Another weakness of the traffic act is that it does not direct the judges of the police court to note on the back of the permits major infractions of the law. The law should require the police court to make such notations, which notations might in the future be considered *prima facie* evidence of previous offenses against the traffic act.

RECKLESS DRIVING

Section 9 of the act should be so amended as to more clearly define reckless driving. Paragraphs b, c, and d of this section are confusing.

PROSECUTION OF TRAFFIC VIOLATIONS

The act should be so amended as to provide that all traffic violations with the exception of section 11 of the act of Congress, March 3, 1925, be prosecuted by the corporation counsel. The present system of having certain violations prosecuted by the corporation counsel and others by the United States attorney is not calculated to produce the best results.

TRAFFIC SURVEYS

Preliminary traffic counts, statistical data, and traffic flow and spot maps have been prepared, largely through voluntary help of the Boy Scouts, the United States Bureau of Public Roads, and Mr. A. P. Robbins, who has generously contributed his services to the department during the summer. This work is of inestimable value and should be continued and kept up to date in order that the traffic department may be in position to study the cause and location of accidents and to devise possible remedies for dangerous traffic situations which may arise from time to time. Additional funds for carrying on traffic survey and traffic statistical work are called for in the estimates in order that this important work may be carried on.

A REVOLVING FUND SUGGESTED

If Congress could be induced to set apart all funds received for the issuance of new permits, for renewals, and duplicates, and the funds derived from registration of automobiles the amount received would be sufficient to support the work of the traffic department, including the purchase of automatic lights, signals, signs, etc., and the employment of the necessary staff of traffic specialists and helpers and to pay the clerks who are employed in issuing automobile registrations and drivers' permits. The estimated receipts from these sources for the next fiscal year will be as follows:

130,000 registrations, at \$1 each.....	\$130,000
150,000 renewals of permits, at \$1 each.....	150,000
20,000 permits to new operators, at \$2 each.....	40,000
8,000 duplicate permits, at 50 cents each.....	4,000
Total.....	324,000

CERTIFICATE OF TITLE LAW

It is believed that the adoption of a certificate of title law for automobiles similar to that which has been adopted in 20 or more of the States will effectually destroy the market for stolen cars in the District. At the present time automobiles are stolen in near-by States where they have title laws and are brought into the District where they are sold at a small fraction of their real value. This is to some extent accountable for the large number of irresponsible drivers who are operating cars in the District.

A number of national organizations interested in this subject, as well as the Bureau of Investigation of the Department of Justice, favor the enactment of uniform certificate of title laws in all of the States and in the District of Columbia.

The main feature of this law is that it places the burden of proof regarding ownership upon the possessor of the vehicle. Every car owner must secure and have in his possession a certificate of title proving his ownership to the car in question. In order to register a car for the purpose of securing a license to operate he must produce this certificate, which is good for the life of the car so long as it is used by the original owner.

Upon the sale of the car by the owner he makes an assignment of title by indorsing the certificate over to the purchaser, who in turn must procure a new title by returning the old certificate to the official in charge of the operation of the law. The official then issues a new title and records a complete account of the transaction in the files kept for the purpose. No legal transfer of a motor vehicle can be made without recording the certificate of title. The usual fee charged for a certificate in the various States is \$1.

The adoption of the law in 20 or more States has had a marked effect in reducing the theft of automobiles and the cost of theft insurance. These reductions in the insurance rates have been more than sufficient to pay the nominal charge incident to securing the title papers, and it is believed that the rates will be still further reduced when uniform title laws have been adopted throughout the country.

Copy of a suggested certificate of title law, which is practically the same as that which has been adopted in 20 or more of the States, is attached hereto for submission to Congress in case the commissioners feel that such legislation should be enacted.

FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Suggestions have been made that all motorists be required to establish their financial responsibility by providing themselves with public liability and property damage insurance or indemnity bonds to pay for accidents for which they may be held responsible. This matter has been considered by the legislatures of several States during the past year, but thus far no legislation of this kind appears to have been passed except for public-service vehicles.

The consensus among traffic experts and insurance men is that from a safety standpoint it would be unwise to require motorists as a class to provide themselves with such insurance or bonds on the ground that it might have the effect of increasing accidents, inasmuch

as it would, to some extent, relieve motorists of responsibility and place it on the shoulders of the bondsmen or insurance companies who would pay the bill.

A substitute plan, which, in my opinion, would be less objectionable and perhaps just as effective, provides for the suspension of the permit of any motorist who is unable to satisfy a judgment involving injury to persons or property until such judgment is satisfied. This would have the effect of forcing many motorists technically irresponsible to settle judgments obtained against them and would doubtless bring about a greater degree of caution on the part of such persons on account of the possibility of losing their permits to drive. This plan would not add an unnecessary burden to the thousands of careful and conscientious motorists who are never involved in traffic accidents, but would have the effect of placing the responsibility and burden where it belongs.

GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The director of traffic wishes to express his warm appreciation for the whole-hearted cooperation and support received from the District Commissioners, the police department, the traffic court judges, the commercial and civic organizations, the newspapers, and the law-abiding motorists and pedestrians of Washington. If this support is supplemented by adequate appropriations to carry on the work as above outlined, we can look forward to the day when the Nation's Capital will set an example in the safe and easy flow of traffic which other cities will emulate.

M. O. ELDRIDGE,
Director of Traffic.

○



